

Media Effects on the Modern Battlefield
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Media Effects on the Modern Battlefield

The Media in the modern era are indisputably an instrument of war since winning modern wars is as much dependant on carrying domestic and international public opinion as it is on defeating the enemy.¹

With modern advances in communications, the enemy's of the world can easily cripple decisive military efforts.

Communication means have become cheap and accessible! Anyone possessing video capable cell phones, video recorders, and Internet access can strategically shape today's battlefield.

The "news" has become the enemy's weapon of choice in Gorilla Warfare. It has become crucial for militarists to manage the media by filtering raw media and limiting civilian information access.

NEED FOR NEWS

The world demands to know. Is it just curiosity, or is it a genuine need to know exactly what takes place on the front lines? The "Media and Journalism" have had their place in war as long as war has existed. That's not the argument. The argument is, to what degree do we allow front line journalism on the battlefield. Since today's wars are more heavily fought on the strategic level, as Kenneth Payne, a BBC news producer in charge of defense security and intelligence issues, states:

The experience of the US military in the post-Cold War world demonstrates that victory on the battlefield is

¹ Kenneth Payne. The Media as an Instrument of War. Carlisle Barracks: Spring 2005. Vol. 35, Iss. 1, p. 81-93 (13 pp.)

seldom as simple as defeating the enemy by force of arms. From Somalia and Haiti through Kosovo and Afghanistan, success has been defined in political, rather than military, terms.²

Not everything needs to be reported. It is not necessary for every citizen to watch every single raid or car search of any given conflict, while he/she eats dinner or surfs "You Tube." The "People's" need to know the detailed information of every military action on the battlefield usually does not outweigh the negative aspects of war journalism; the loss of military lives. A prime example of "too much media on the battlefield," is the case of the exposed Navy SEAL's on the beach, during Operation Desert Shield. During the initial assault, a team of Navy SEAL's was met by a media frenzy and a barrage of flashing cameras. The reconnaissance mission was supposed to be covert, as any of their missions. Instead, they were ambushed by U.S. and international media.

War Journalist's walk a fine line indeed. A reporter on the war front could have very different opinions of war policy and can heavily influence the battle. Those reporters not supporting military operations will report all negative news and withhold the positive. As Kenneth Payne states, "...there is always an inherent tension between the ostensible goals of

² Kenneth Payne. Parameters. The Media as an Instrument of War. Carlisle Barracks: Spring 2005. Vol. 35, Iss. 1, p. 81-93 (13 pp.)

impartial and balanced media reporting and the military objectives of the combatants,"³ a fine line indeed.

TRENDS OF THE NEW MEDIA

Since the late 1990's, there have been more mergers and buyouts of large corporate news companies than ever before. These corporate news mergers create a huge ripple in mainstream media, establishing large corporations in control of multiple international means. In some cases, these corporate news mergers create single media moguls, powerful enough to control half the world's media.

Australian billionaire Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox News and News Corps, in 2003 became purchased Direct TV, extending his media reach all across Europe, Latin America and Asia. He has become a sole entity with the ability to massively create, dictate or influence the outcome of current and future wars.

Murdoch and other massive media conglomerations, play a key role in today's battlefield. Their role or in Murdoch's case, his role in controlling what we see, hear, or read, make it a very volatile situation. It is vital to have more diversity amongst existing media resources. Some argue that there needs to be a limit to today's media mergers, in exactly how large

³ Kenneth Payne. Parameters. The Media as an Instrument of War. Carlisle Barracks: Spring 2005. Vol. 35, Iss. 1, p. 81-93 (13 pp.)

conglomerates can become. Without limitation, media empires would have enough marketing power to buy a war.⁴

MODERN DAY MEDIA WEAPONS

Media means have evolved tremendously throughout the years. During the Civil War, the majority of the news was documented via black and white photos, and some pen and ink. During World War I and World War II, the battles were brought to the home front via the introduction of television. With innovative technologies, media means have become more robust, providing instant broadcasting and immediate means of mainstream media.

Today's information warfare encompass' a wide range of mass media weapons, both inexpensive and easy to access. The scope includes but is not limited to: The Internet, cell phones, Iridium Phones, cameras (video, digital, etc...), laptops or any other type of computer access. Each media weapon brings its own capability, making the spectrum too large and difficult for conventional military to monitor.

With the introduction of the Internet, everyone was given the ability to broadcast multiple types of media to any location in the world. Cell phones have become the insurgent weapon of mass destruction. Multiple providers have made it cheap and easy to use without being traced. Cell phones have also

⁴ Anup Shah. "Media Conglomerates, Mergers, Concentration of Ownership." <http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Corporations/Owners.asp>

introduced a means for introducing triggers for improvised explosive devices, making it harder for communicating in the field.

Effective Public Affairs has also become crucial to information warfare. An effective Public Affairs Officer can wage havoc on enemy intelligence through deception operations and through misinformation. There are many more modern-day communication weapons, but these are the most common, most volatile, making them the weapons of choice.

CONTROLLING NEWS

Many will argue at the mere proposition of filtering and limiting media on modern battlefield. In fact, it goes against the very thread of democracy—the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The media should be allowed to report everything and anything, after all, the people pay their taxes and have the "right to know."

The people's right to know shares a fine balance with military operations. Because of conflicting interests, the military itself, media moguls or news corporations with conflicting interests, should not be allowed to dictate what can be reported on the front lines. Having an impartial party evens out the battlefield, even though there are existing differences;

"... there are tensions between objectivity, patriotism, and humanitarianism."⁵

CONCLUSION

Technology has truly altered the modern battlefield. Because "news" has become the enemy's weapon of choice, strategists have to recognize information management and flow, as it is the "new asymmetric flank."⁶

⁵ Barbie Zelizer. "A Scholarly Look at War Reporting." Volume 58, Issue 2, p. 92-93. Cambridge: Summer 2004.

⁶ US/IRAQ: Pentagon Altars "information war" strategy. OxResearch. Oxford: Jul 2004

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